

Dark Paris  
By Jacob Gray

'Oh , this is so boring. I can't see past all the tourists.'

'Let's just buy a postcard. I really could do with a look round the gift shop. I must get my aunty a dish towel with the Eiffel Tower on it.'

Mrs Wilson turned and looked at her two pupils. 'Oh, girls, the school takes you to Paris and all you're interested in is the gift shop!'

Katherine turned from her friend. 'Sorry, miss, I do like the paintings, but I can't go home empty handed. It was my aunt who paid for the holiday.'

'Yes. Mrs Wilson. We are 17 ! There is a limit to the number of paintings we can look at in a day.'

Mrs Wilson scowled, 'Amanda, it's the Mona Lisa. It is worth having a look at her.'

Katherine pulled her friend's sleeve and they pushed through the crowds. 'Bloody woman! She knows I'm called Andi. No one calls me Amanda. Right, Kat?'

'Yeah, no one uses your name. Usually it's " Oi you" .' Kat laughed as she continued to guide her friend through the masses of tourists.

'How many Euros have you? I think we should go to the gift shop. Then get a can and get out of this labyrinth of art.'

' "Labyrinth" ! That's Kat the thesaurus.'

The two girls wound their way through the Louvre. Gallery after gallery of the world's greatest art, but neither girl cared very much and they chatted happily away to one another.

Katherine and Amanda, having purchased various small gifts, decided to go outside. They sat in the pale April sunshine, feeling they had given the Louvre Gallery their greatest attention. They sat and sipped diet cola and tried hard to look uninterested.

'Oh, look, there's that guy on crutches from the year below,' Kat said.

'Oh ,damn! It's Ryan ! Is he coming over?' Andi asked, suddenly flustered.

Kat rolled her eyes at her friend. 'You know the guys name?'

'Yeh, he's hot, plays rugby. Oh, man, he's coming over to us. Act cool.'

The young man hobbled over to the girls. He was walking with crutches, his left foot was in a cast.

'Hello there, I'm Ryan. We nodded to each other on the Calais ferry. I am in the year below. So how you enjoying the trip?'

Kat stood back and gave Ryan a look that implied he was being too forward for her liking. Then she realised that Andi was not acting herself and was giggling, seemingly enthralled by their new companion.

She knew she'd have to break the ice for her friend.

'I'm Kat and this pseudo-fashion icon with me is Andi. I can't say I know you from school.'

'I have been training with the national team and that takes me away a lot.'

Kat scowled slightly. 'What national team?'

Ryan smiled at Kat. 'Under 18's rugby,' he said, with a casual shrug.

Andi tried to compose herself. She looked away and back at the façade of the Louvre. 'Fantastic paintings, I love great art.'

Kat tried not to laugh.

'Oh, I wasn't looking at the paintings. It was the Egyptian art that I liked. Did you take in the antiquities, or were you jumping around trying to glimpse the Mona Lisa?' Ryan laughed.

They then fell into a friendly conversation. Kat was rather surprised by how intellectual Ryan was, especially as he seemed to spend most of his school day playing rugby.

Suddenly there was a commotion among the other tourists who thronged outside the Louvre.

Everyone began to look up and point, gasping at what they were seeing.

Running at a great pace along the pitched roofline of the Louvre were three men. One man was ahead of the other two. He was running away from them. There was something menacing about the spectacle.

'Are they free-running?' Andi asked.

'No, that's a pursuit,' Ryan replied.

Then, just as quickly as they had appeared, the three men were over the roof and gone from sight.

Kat straightened the sleeves of her jacket. 'Listen, guys, we'd better go back in. It's getting close to our meet up time.'

'Oh, yeah, don't want old Mrs Wilson doing a head count without us.'

As they turned to go back inside, someone suddenly burst through the crowds and ran straight into them.

Andi screamed and Ryan instinctively grabbed her, dropping his crutches. Kat had been knocked to the ground by the man. He was the man who had been running on the roof. A look of terror filled his face.

However, in a flash he got up and ran off through the crowds, leaving Kat sitting on the ground.

'Are you alright?' cried Andi as she and a few other tourists came to Kat's assistance. Just then there was a scream from somewhere, and two more men burst through the crowds. They were masked, with dark tights over their faces.

After getting back to her feet, and shaking off imaginary dirt, Kat smiled and insisted she was fine. She didn't want a fuss. She was blushing.

A young man rushed towards them. He was Kat's age. He had a baseball cap on with a hood pulled over it.

Ryan stepped forward to stop him. However, the man pushed past Ryan without slowing down. He was chasing after the two masked men.

Kat caught his eye as he dashed past. She was mesmerised. She stared after him, his piercing silver eyes burning into her mind.

'What the hell is this? Terrorists?' Andi asked.

She grabbed Kat by the arm. 'C'mon, let's get back to the others,' and with Ryan hobbling quickly behind they hurried back inside the gallery.

Kat's head was spinning. In her mind she could only see the silvery eyes of the young man who had dashed past. She was still shaken from having been knocked over.

She glanced down into her hand. The man who had knocked her over had pressed something into her palm. She was still too shaken to think what it might be.

As the three hurried along, Kat opened her hand and took a glimpse.

'Oh my God,' she thought, 'it has to be what those two men were after.'

## Part 2

'Sit down!' yelled Mrs Wilson.

She marched up the aisle of the coach and did another head count. 'Alright, quieten down. We are now heading for a shopping centre with an ice rink.'

There was a collective cheer from all the students. Mrs Wilson sighed and shook her head, then took her seat next to her fellow teacher.

'We take them to Paris, to the Louvre! and they go through it like a dose of salts. Mention shops and skating and they are ecstatic.'

'Oh Pearl, we were the same at their age too,' Miss Taylor replied.

Kat sat quietly. She couldn't get the silver-eyed face of the young man out her head. She looked down at her clenched fist. She still hadn't opened her hand. Then, slowly, she looked - she was holding a small key. Tied to the key was a crumpled tag, written on it was the number 1795.

The man who had collided with her had pressed the key into her hand.

'Why? What did he say?'

'Why what?' asked Andi. She turned and looked at her friend.

'You've been awfully quiet since stepping on the bus. Are you ok?'

Kat hesitated. She put the key into her pocket. 'Yes, yes, I'm fine. Now tell me what is all this drooling over our crippled rugby player?'

They spent the journey gossiping and giggling, and occasionally casting a backwards glance at Ryan.

The afternoon was spent shopping and skating. Andi, who enjoyed skating, stood on the rink at the side, talking to Ryan who seemed enraptured.

Mrs Wilson appeared at the designated meet-up point and with a grim face began her head count. Eventually, when satisfied, she led everyone back to the coach.

She commented that it was getting dark early.

'Ah, springtime in Paris!' Miss Taylor replied.

'I'm hungry,' Ryan complained. He had moved seats so that he was now sitting behind Kat and Andi.

'It's quite late. Dinner will be late at the hotel.'

Kat peered out the window. 'It's very dark. Have we left the city?'

From down the front of the coach there was a discussion in French between two of the teachers and the driver.

Mrs Wilson, stood up again. She looked worried. She walked down the aisle to join the discussion at the front of the coach.

As she neared the front, the coach began to swerve dramatically and Mrs Wilson was thrown down the steps at the door.

There were yells and screams from the students.

The coach stopped.

'What's going on? Did we crash? What did he swerve to miss?' Andi asked.

Kat did not reply. She stared out the window. It was pitch black outside.

'We aren't anywhere near the city,' she murmured.

Ryan also stared out the window. His eyes focused on something. 'Do you see that?' he said as he stood up and pointed out the window.

The coach had stopped on a dark road that was surrounded by trees. The driver stood up and opened the coach door. Mrs Wilson who lay against the door tumbled half out. The teachers had crowded down the front of the coach and were shouting.

Then they fell quiet. Something was approaching the coach. It was something extraordinary.

Flashes of dazzling violet light exploded from within the trees, and the flashes were getting closer. Within each flash the shapes of people could be made out. They were marching straight forward, dressed in black, their faces looked peculiar in the purple blasts of light.

'This isn't good,' Ryan said and he moved himself on his crutches. He went to the back of the coach and opened the emergency exit.

'Andi, Kat, we need to go this way,' he shouted.

At that moment the last flash of light exploded in front of the coach. A row of ghostly pale faces, people dressed formally, all in black, as if for a funeral, stood there at the coach.

The violet light faded to purple and then went out. It was dark. The screams began.

Leaning on one crutch, Ryan pulled Andi and Kat out of the coach and they retreated back.

'This is really not good,' Ryan whispered.

The students and teachers were being taken off the coach and led into the trees. Ryan pulled Kat and Andi. They tried to make for the trees to hide.

Stepping round the corner of the coach, one of the white faced, strange people appeared. A grin stretched over its face. It stared at them. Then it screamed, a high pitched shrieking cry.

'Oh God, it's found us,' Andi cried.

There was the sound of a car approaching, its headlamps lighting up the road. A red convertible sports car charged over the hill and screeched to a halt beside Kat.

'Get in!' shouted the driver and he flung open the door. It was the young man with the silver eyes. Kat, Andi and Ryan fell into the car. The car growled, and drove off quickly.

'Hi, I'm Tobias,' said the driver in an American accent. He flashed his silver eyes and smiled at Kat.

'What the hell is happening?' Kat cried.

'You guys have just survived the Dark of Paris,' Tobias grinned.

In his grand chateaux, Guy de Winter grimaced.

'My Dark Paris, you have failed to obtain the key. A simple enough task. Yet you failed !' Guy sipped fresh blood from a crystal tumbler.

He shook his head. 'Marchpane, my dear lady, I require your services.'

Into the room stepped a lady with pale skin and raven black hair. She wore an extravagant dress and her arms were heavily tattooed.

'Yes, Winter, I shall retrieve your key,' the woman nodded.

'By any means, Marchpane, find that girl and get that key from her. Tobias and his lot will put up a struggle.'

Marchpane straightened her dress. 'Winter, I never fail.'

### Part 3

Tobias pulled into a lay-by. He switched off the engine, tipped his baseball cap back and turned to look at Kat.

She couldn't look back at him. Her heart pounded. 'Thank you for saving us,' she managed.

'We are not safe yet. They want you badly.' Tobias touched Kat's arm. She shuddered at his touch. She glanced at his handsome face. She managed to look in his eyes. They were an extraordinary silvery grey colour.

He smiled. 'Don't worry, I'll look after you.'

Tobias started the engine and pulled away sharply.

He drove back into Paris; the lights of the city were reassuring. After travelling for what seemed ages, he pulled up outside a theatre.

Andi, Kat and Ryan were ushered inside. The theatre had been converted into prestigious apartments.

Tobias opened a pair of double doors. 'Come on inside and meet my fellow 'roof-runners'. You'll all be safe with us.'

They stepped into a large, luxuriously furnished room. Sitting relaxing were a dozen teenagers, all dressed casually, wearing the same distinctive hoodie that Tobias wore.

'Everyone, these are the Scottish kids. They are in big trouble. Dark Paris has pulled one hell of a stunt kidnapping their classmates.'

None of the assembled 'roof-runners' seemed too bothered. They glanced up and then continued using their phones and laptops.

Tobias took off his baseball cap and ran his fingers through his jagged brown hair. 'We'll get some takeaway food, then I'll explain just how serious a situation you three are in.'

After an hour of explanation, everyone had fallen silent. Ryan kept eating the Chinese food that had been ordered. Andi sat beside Kat. She was feeling very worried. 'We need to get the police. How can we trust these guys?'

'No, no police!' Tobias shouted. 'The only safe place is here, with us.'

Andi was angry. 'Vampires? You expect us to believe that?'

'I don't care what you believe. It's true. There is a select group of rich people that live in Paris.'

They only appear when it's dark. They dine on human blood and they do not age. So vampire is as good a description as any.'

Andi stood up. 'So what do they want with a bus of school trippers?'

'To kill us?' Ryan asked.

'No, kidnap is not their style. It was a very public stunt. No, they wanted something.'

'I know what they wanted,' Kat said. She put her hand in her pocket and lifted out the key. 'They are after this. They are after me!' She began to cry.

Tobias went over to Kat and put his arm round her. She looked at him and smiled.

After more talking, they realised what was happening. Tobias had been trying to catch a rogue 'roof-runner' at the Louvre. Two agents of Dark Paris had also been after him.

This rogue had stolen something from the leader of the Dark Paris vampires and what he had stolen had been hidden and locked away.

Kat was now in possession of the key to that lock and now she was the focus of attention from Dark Paris.

'Very clear. I think I understand,' Kat said. 'But what of our friends that were taken? Will they be alright?'

'For the time being,' Tobias answered gravely.

A few hours later Ryan and Andi had fallen asleep on a couch. Tobias was busy talking with his fellow roof-runners. Kat was restless. She felt that everything was her fault.

She wandered around the apartment; it was filled with works of art. These were apparently stolen by the teenage roof runners to fund their secret enterprise.

These teenagers defended Paris at night. They were recruited for their gymnastic and free-running ability; they had been assembled from all over the world. They patrolled the roofs of Paris, killing the nocturnal vampires.

It was all so extraordinary. Kat didn't know if she could believe it. Yet here she was in the middle of it all. She slipped out the apartment.

She couldn't sleep. Every time she closed her eyes she saw Tobias. She blushed. She was in love !

Marchpane travelled by limousine along the dark and empty streets of Paris. She knew where Tobias hid out and she was not afraid of confronting him.

In the back of the limousine Marchpane drank blood from the arm of a now dead woman.

The limousine slowed down and the dead woman was unceremoniously dumped onto the pavement.

Having fed, Marchpane felt invigorated. She rubbed her tattooed arms and then flattened out her satin dress.

Through the balcony window a hooded roof-runner climbed into the apartment. He was as light and agile as a cat. 'Marchpane, Marchpane is here!'

Tobias leapt up and glanced around the room. 'Where is Kat?'

Andi and Ryan woke up and the apartment was in commotion.

They were too late. Marchpane had driven to the converted theatre. She had marched into the foyer and there had found Kat. There had been no escape for Kat. She had been paralysed by fear.

She had then been bundled into the limousine which now sped off back to Guy de Winter.

'I'm going after her,' Tobias said.

Andi grabbed Ryan by the hand. 'We are coming too.'